Garifuna Women and the Politics of Cultural Heritage:

The Legacy of the Belizean Women's Movement

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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by

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I. Introduction

The tension between globalization and the preservation of local cultures is one faced by numerous indigenous peoples, rural workers, and other marginalized groups around the world. Throughout their history, the Garifuna, a black indigenous group in Central America, have dealt with this tension by leveraging their differences in order to adapt to displacement. Garifuna women, in particular, have played a critical role in the perseverance of their culture by carving out their own space, no matter what obstacles, new or old, seek to restrain them. In this study, I explore the work of Garifuna women in the history of Belize and today through the question: How have Garifuna women in Belize negotiated and transformed cultural politics in relation to race, gender, and class as organizers of and participants in Belize's women's movement?

I attempt to answer this question using two subprojects that focus on the work of Garifuna women during Belize's women's movement in the 1980s and 1990s as well as today. The first subproject focuses on the perspective of Ms. Cynthia Ellis, a Garifuna woman and leader in the Belizean women's movement whose activism continues today. I connected with Ms. Ellis in the summer of 2020 over a shared interest in interviewing her about her life's work. For my part, I hoped to gain insight into the Belizean women's movement as fieldwork for my thesis. On the other hand, Ms. Ellis hopes to use the material from our interview to write and publish a memoir in the future. We are both passionate about using the documentation of her experiences to contribute to the sparse literature and documentation on the Belizean women's movement. I use interviews about her life and work to create a narrative about the motivations and factors that influenced the successes and shortcomings of the Belizean women's movement of the 1980s and 1990s. This topic is significant because of the limited record of the Belizean women's movement. There are very few accounts of the Belizean women's movement, and those that do exist, most notably Anne Macpherson's 2007 book *From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982* and Irma McClaurin's ethnography *Women in Belize* (1996), do not present a comprehensive narrative about the accomplishments of women

during this time and the reasons for the rise and fall of the movement. Through Ms. Ellis' account, I aim to contribute to the formation of a more complete account of the causes, consequences and events of the Belizean women's movement. Specifically, I argue that the momentum of the women's movement in Belize stemmed in part from the independence-era political consciousness and the United Nations Decade for women. Activists like Ms. Ellis worked to translate this momentum to gain funding and support for the issues like family health and wellness that directly concern women and communities in Belize.

My second subproject focuses on the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative (Sandy Beach or SBWC), a Garifuna women's cooperative in Hopkins Village in the Stann Creek District of Belize, which is historically rooted in the Belizean women's movement. I follow the work of the women of Sandy Beach to create a museum of Garifuna culture and history on the site of their business, and the questions of cultural heritage that arise through this project. Specifically, I look at Garifuna activism locally in Belize and abroad, control of Garifuna ancestral lands, and the role of tourism and the labor market by asking questions about who has the power to shape the narrative of Garifuna culture and history and who stands to benefit from initiatives to preserve cultural heritage. My work with the SBWC began in summer 2019, when I traveled to Belize for two weeks to help the women craft a proposal to apply for grants for their museum project. While there, I learned through conversations with the women in the group about their history and their connections to the women's movement. Since then, I have continued to keep in touch with Ms. Merlene Castillo, the current president of the cooperative. As of late, my work with Sandy Beach and my work with Ms. Ellis are merging, as we are all working together to obtain funding for the Sandy Beach museum project and to help the women obtain official ownership of the land that they have occupied since 1986. I elaborate on these concrete plans below. The cooperative is a tangible outcome of the women's movement, and in studying their history and current work I

further contribute to the documentation of the long-lasting effects of the Belizean women's movement. Additionally, as a collective of Garifuna women fighting for their right to exist in the larger tourism industry, Sandy Beach is important in the context of indigenous struggles for cultural autonomy and recognition and against assimilation. Overall, the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative has built on their status as rural Garifuna women to create a legacy as part of the Belizean women's movement and an important site for Garifuna cultural heritage today. Specifically, their efforts to create a Garifuna cultural heritage museum require the women to negotiate both international and local networks of funding and support while also striving to maintain their own vision for the content and outcomes of the museum. The process of imagining and creating the museum raises contentious issues of cultural politics including the politics of migration and tourism, the transnational character of Garifuna activism, and the access and ownership to Garifuna ancestral lands.

Both of these subprojects come together to provide a greater understanding of the role of Garifuna women in the history and cultural heritage of Belize. The work of both Cynthia Ellis and the women of Sandy Beach during the women's movement in the 1980s and 1990s shaped social activism and the role of Garifuna women in the newly-independent nation. Today, their continued work demonstrates the enduring nature of Garifuna women's activism, and their successes as well as the obstacles they face provide greater insight into how factors like race, class, gender, religion, language, and others shape Belizean society.

II. Literature Review

Cultural Heritage

The main object of this research is the politics of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is commonly viewed through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This UNESCO program stems from the view that "urbanization, modernization, and globalization constitute a great danger for the variety of human culture," and thus aims to recognize and preserve cultural practices that are at risk of disappearing (Nas 2002: 142). While no specific definition of cultural heritage is listed on the UNESCO site, examples added to the list in 2020 include the Budima dance in Zambia, a grass mowing competition custom in Bosnia and Herzegovina, wooden architecture techniques in Japan, and many more. The language, dance and music of the Garifuna people were added to the list in 2001, and since then many initiatives to preserve Garifuna culture and language have built on this recognition (Ramsdell 2020). Though the list includes a broad range of different types of elements, UNESCO tends to recognize skills, practices and knowledges that are specific to a certain culture and may or may not produce a tangible outcome.

Despite the fact that UNESCO provides the most widely known definition of cultural heritage, it is important to look critically at the implications of the term cultural heritage and explore other definitions. Cultural heritage may be understood in both a material sense and an intangible sense. Tami Blumenfield's (2018) discussion of weaving practices in southwest China and Cristiana Panella's (2012) analysis of wood carving in Mali are two representative works on the material aspects of cultural heritage. Here, cultural heritage is viewed as "the outcome of acts of production by people engaged in physical work and developing strategies for economic survival (Panella 2012: 42). Because the outcome, rather than "the live body of *homo faber* and

its productive acts," is viewed as part of the material culture," cultural heritage is susceptible to objectification and fetishization, while ostracizing the producers who create value from the process (Panella 2012: 51). Indeed, though Blumenfield's analysis is defined by the UNESCO label of "intangible cultural heritage" the practices create woven products as a tangible outcome with economic value. Blumenfield quotes Taylor (2014) in stating that "the production of culture is even more important to capitalism now than in the past," which supports Panella's view that culture is defined by value created (Blumenfield 2018: 189).

Whether or not the cultural heritage itself is tangible, recognition by UNESCO has the potential to deliver material benefits to people. Recognition by UNESCO can increase demand for certain cultural products or stimulate tourism to an area with unique culture and history. However, the current process of recognition inherently leaves some groups out; As Tami Blumenfield writes, "naming one practice as intangible cultural heritage means that another practice is merely ordinary" (Blumenfield 2018: 172). Without a set definition of what intangible cultural heritage means, the difference between what counts and what does not count may come down to which groups have more visibility or access to the administrative process of gaining official recognition. In particular, groups that do not have the means to plead their case to the U.N. are often overlooked. Roy Cayetano, the president of the National Garifuna Council at the time that Garifuna language, music and dance were added to the list, recounts the logistical tasks of applying for recognition, including collecting an inventory of relevant materials, creating a strategy for preservation, and persuading his brother to provide pro-bono planning and consulting services (Cayetano 2021).

Neil Parsons (2006) looks at cultural heritage through the evolution of academic disciplines at the University of Botswana, and argues that the discipline of cultural heritage has

been pulled in the direction of the tourism industry, with the growth in "citizen-owned tourism" which leads to more opportunity for the "'selling' of cultural heritage" (Parsons 2006: 675). However, this status of cultural heritage as a means of economic gain through tourism is not all-encompassing, as "the heritage of any single country... is both much broader and much narrower than the collective heritage of the nation-state" (Parsons 2006: 681). Thus, though tourist sites and heritage tours present pieces of cultural heritage in a given place, these should not be seen as fully representative of the culture and history. In the analysis of my case studies, I aim to keep Parsons' critique of heritage and tourism in mind to avoid any oversimplification of Garifuna culture in Belize through the lens of one group of women.

The work of Laurajane Smith effectively bridges the concepts of material and intangible culture in her critique of the "materialistic understanding of heritage" (2010: 63). Under a materialistic understanding, cultural heritage is something that we manage, look at, define ourselves by, inherit, and view in museums or important sites (Smith 2010: 63). The problem with this definition is that it obscures the role of heritage "in the governance of populations and groups and the way it is used to misrecognise and/or de-politicize the politics of recognition" (Smith 2010: 63). Thus, rather than viewing heritage through the aforementioned material elements, it should be seen as a discourse: "heritage is not a 'thing' but a cultural process of meaning making and of negotiating the meanings and values given to identity, memory and sense of place" (Smith 2010: 63). This is important in the recognition of specific places and remains as sites of cultural heritage; rather than labeling these material objects and spaces as cultural heritage, they are instead tools to help us remember, recognize, and re-negotiate cultural heritage.

In addition to the material vs. intangible discussion of cultural heritage, another important concept to address is the relationship between cultural heritage and identity. Charles Hale (1997)

reviews the literature on the development of identity politics in Latin America, alluding to the idea of cultural heritage, while not directly referencing it. Hale argues that "indigenous peoples now increasingly advance their struggles through a discourse that links Indian identity with rights to territory, autonomy, and peoplehood" (Hale 1997, 571). While this description is more similar to recognition of statehood than to recognition of cultural heritage, these narratives are not distinct. In my experience with the Garifuna in Belize, narratives of cultural heritage and history are closely intertwined with those of territory and autonomy. Laurajane Smith takes this concept of identity politics and makes an explicit connection with cultural heritage. She uses the work of Nancy Fraser to illustrate a "politics of recognition" to allow for "the observation that different community groups, with different histories, needs, aspirations and identities, make claims for recognition in both symbolic and material forms, and that these claims for recognition will have material consequences for equity and justice" (Smith 2010: 61). Thus, recognition is not simply gestural or frivolous, instead serving as a tool for "overcoming subordination" and de-institutionalizing "patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation" (Fraser 2000: 114-115). Heritage discourse and management contribute to the politics of recognition, particularly as a means of understanding the role of researchers and other non-indigenous parties in the recognition and misrecognition of indigenous identities (Smith 2010).

Feminist Theory on Capitalism, Development, and Globalization

While there is an abundance of feminist literature that I could use as a basis for my analysis of the Belizean women's movement, I instead focus on two specific works that I find particularly relevant. An important text from the time of the women's movement is Maria Mies' 1986 book *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, which was published during the heart

of the Belizean women's movement. Mies' theories on gender relations in developing countries informs the views of some of the leaders of the Belizean women's movement, including Ms. Cynthia Ellis, who studied under Mies at the International Institute of Social Studies at the Hague. More recently, Nancy Fraser's *Fortunes of Feminism* (2013) analyzes the impacts of neoliberalism on second-wave feminism from today's perspective that can be applied to the case of Belize.

Maria Mies' work centers on the idea that the oppressive man-woman relation is central to capitalism in every part of the world, though it is articulated differently in developed and developing countries. Mies cites Dalla Costa's argument that while domestic work is often considered "outside" the capitalist mode of production, the productivity of a housewife is a critical precondition to the wage labor of her husband, and thus her unpaid labor is another iteration of capitalism's exploitation of labor (Mies 1986: 31-32). Rosa Luxemburg (1923) similarly expands the definition of the exploitation of labor by capital by recognizing the important role of colonial labor in the capital accumulation process. Mies builds on these analyses in her discussion of the transformation of women in the developing world into slaves who were (at first) forbidden from marrying and bearing children and the transformation of women in the developed world into "pure, monogamous breeders" (Mies 1986: 90). Further, she argues that one component of the "civilizing mission" of colonizers into the developing world was to fix the "backwardness" of equality between the sexes that was present in many of the colonized societies (Mies 1986: 90).

Particularly in the later years, after 1989, the Belizean women's movement had a strong focus on violence against women, especially domestic violence, which was viewed as a family issue. Mies' theory on the exportation of women's inferiority analyzes the use of rape and

violence against women as "an instrument to maintain both existing class and existing men-women relations," in two ways: First, as an outlet where men exploited by colonialism and capitalism could act as the aggressor, and second, as a tool for the humiliation of "smaller" (in status) men by assaulting their women (Mies 1986, 168). Mies argues that activists against rape and domestic violence are often more radical than they believe, because their work helps "to tear the veil from the facade of so-called civilized society and has laid bare its hidden, brutal, violent foundations," disrupting the "peaceful" image of modern-day society (Mies 1986: 14).

Since the Belizean women's movement fits as an example of second-wave feminism, I look to Nancy Fraser's *Fortunes of Feminism* (2013) for a critique. In the second part of this book (most relevant to my analysis of the Belizean women's movement) Fraser analyzes the deradicalization of feminism in the neoliberal age. The first way in which neoliberalism, globalization in particular, has affected feminist activism is a shift in the "all-affected principle," which holds that "all those affected by a given social structure or institution have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it" (Fraser 2013: 273-274). Until recently, this principle was viewed as coinciding with the "state-territorial principle," which says that "shared residence on the territory of a modern state and/or... shared membership in the political community that corresponds to such a state" is what makes a group of individuals "fellow subjects of justice" (Fraser 2013: 272). Though of course these two principles were never fully overlapping due to the history of colonialism and neocolonialism, in the age of globalization they appear particularly at odds, as "globalization is driving a widening wedge between state territoriality and social effectivity" (Fraser 2013: 275). This shift from the state-territorial to the all-affected principle meant that new social movements had to reject the standard view of rights as the prerogative of

states and instead use the international stage, or an altogether different method, for their advocacy.

Next, Fraser goes on to discuss various ways that in developing countries, any critiques of the development state "morphed into enthusiasm for NGOs, which emerged everywhere to fill the spaces vacated by shrinking states" (Fraser 2013: 300). Fraser's example of the rise of micro-credit institutions illustrates this phenomenon well:

> Counterposing feminist values of empowerment and participation from below to the passivity-inducing red tape of top-down étatism, the architects of these projects have crafted an innovative synthesis of individual self-help and community networking, NGO oversight and market mechanisms - all aimed at combating women's poverty and gender subjection. (Fraser 2013: 300)

The downside of this rise in NGOs is that "the effect was often to depoliticize the grassroots and to skew the agendas of local groups in directions favored by First-World funders" (Fraser 2013: 300). This "NGO-ification" of feminist activism led to a widening of the "gap between professionals and the grassroots, while according disproportionate voice to English-speaking elites" (Fraser 2013: 302).

Garifuna People and Belize

Finally, the history of the Garifuna people, both before and after their arrival in Belize, is critical in understanding the culture entailed in "cultural heritage." The literature on Garifuna history and culture is vast, and my review covers only a small selection of works that best contextualize my research.

The history of the Garifuna is an important point of pride for many Garifuna people. The Garifuna began with the wreck of a ship (possibly multiple ships) full of would-be slaves near the island of St. Vincent in the Caribbean. According to Sarah England (2006), the shipwrecks

that led to the origin of the Garifuna people may have occurred in 1635, 1675, or even as late as 1742 (though 1635 is the most recognized date). At least some of the Africans on these ships made it ashore on St. Vincent, an island that the British had set aside for natives, who they called 'Red Caribs,' in 1660 (England 2006). Upon arriving at St. Vincent, there was both conflict and cooperation between the Africans and the indigenous people who already lived there, and by about 1700 a group that was simultaneously both black and indigenous populated the island: the Garifuna (Palacio 2019).

The Garifuna, called 'Black Caribs' by the British, were not left alone in peace on St. Vincent. Instead, the British considered their presence a "nuisance" which warranted war and efforts at elimination. The Carib War of 1795-1796, where the Garifuna were led by Joseph Chatoyer, sparked a forced deportation from St. Vincent, when 2,026 out of about 4,000 Garifuna landed on the small island of Roatan, where conditions were not favorable for agriculture and the environment was inhospitable (Gonzalez 1988). In between the deportation from St. Vincent and the arrival at Roatan, the other 2,000 Garifuna died on the island of Baliceaux in 1796-1797 as a result of a "malignant fever" which was likely typhus or yellow fever (Gonzalez 1988). Because of this tragedy, the site of Baliceaux remains a powerful symbol of exile, death and resistance among Garifuna people (Finneran and Welch 2019, Hume and Andrews 2021). While the British hoped that the Garifuna would face extinction at Roatan (Gonzalez 1988), instead they eventually settled along the mainland of Central America.

In Belize, the first group of Garifuna settlers are reported to have arrived in 1802 to work at British logging camps (England 2006). The Garifuna were known among the colonizing powers as good workers, and thus were valued as wage laborers for woodcutting and farming (Kerns 1983, England 2006, Anderson 2009, Gonzalez 1988). In part because of this reputation,

and despite their occupation of Belize's coastal lands for many years, the *Laws in Force Act* of 1855, in which the colonial government affirmed the land titles of those who had previously occupied lands, did not include the Garifuna so that they could be permanently available to the British for cheap labor (Shoman 2011, Palacio 2019). Furthermore, Garifuna were actively barred from the opportunity to purchase their land, instead having to lease it from the state (Shoman 2011, Bolland 2004). Despite this exclusion, the Garifuna population in Belize continued to grow, becoming an "important part of the peopling of southern Belize" (Shoman 2011: 60). In part because of their location away from Belize Town, the Garifuna were able to maintain their religion, language and other cultural practices, though they were still economically integrated with the rest of the colony (Shoman 2011). They served in various positions as food providers, laborers and policemen, but were especially recognized for the fact that Garifuna teachers were among the only ones to learn the Maya languages and to teach in Maya schools (Enriquez 2017; Ellis, personal communication, 6 July 2021).

Today, many young Garifuna people, leave the country to attend university abroad or to seek out other economic opportunities. As Sarah England writes, migration "has increased to the point that it has become an integral part of Garifuna society" (2006: 2). This has left Garifuna villages in southern Belize with inhabitants who are primarily over the age of fifty or under the age of fourteen, with very few people of working age (Palacio 2019). While some return after receiving their education, many will instead send remittances to family members or maintain property locally so that they can come back and visit. I expand on the pattern of migration out of Belize and out of Garifuna villages in my second subproject on the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative, as these trends play a major role in the demographics of Hopkins Village, where the cooperative is located.

III. Documenting the Work of Ms. Cynthia Ellis

The first case study in my exploration of Garifuna women's activism and the politics of Garifuna cultural heritage centers on the life of Ms. Cynthia Ellis. Ms. Ellis is a Garifuna woman who was born and lived most of her life in Belize, though she spent time living in Canada as a child, in Jamaica and the Netherlands as a student, and in the United States as an adult. I met Ms. Ellis for the first time over Zoom, when the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted my plans of traveling to Belize to complete my fieldwork. Between July and September 2020, I interviewed Ms. Ellis about her life's work and experience, in order to inform both my own work and to assist her in documenting her thoughts for the production of a memoir in the future. Though no singular story can be used to create a definitive narrative of the Belizean women's movement, Ms. Ellis's role as one of the leaders of the movement, as well as her continued work as an activist today, make her an important source to shed light on the context, motivations, goals, successes, and failures of the movement, especially considering that there are very few recorded accounts, academic or otherwise, about the movement.

Anne Macpherson's 2007 book *From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982* is the most prominent existing account of women's activism in Belize, yet it does not cover the full scope of Belize's women's movement, which occurred mainly in the 1980s and 1990s. Macpherson historicizes the political acivism of Belizean women, often differentiating between the "bembe politics" of working class women and the reformist, often elitist, agendas of middle/upper class women. Irma McClaurin, author of *Women in Belize*, another important work on the Belizean women's movement, discusses the difficulties in reconstructing the history of the women's movement, as many archival files have been "lost or discarded" (179). McClaurin's ethnography uses in-depth interviews with Belizean

women of different backgrounds to postulate on the social position of women in Belize and the role of women's organizations in the women's movement. Overall, these two main accounts of women's activism in Belize exist do not sufficiently reconstruct the story of the Belizean women's movement and extract important lessons that can be applied to future social movements in Belize.

Building on my interviews with Ms. Ellis as well as the work of Macpherson and McClaurin, I argue that the Belizean women's movement was shaped by three major forces. First, the political context immediately before and after Independence shaped the women's movement as its leaders began to articulate their goals for women's rights in contrast to the independence and national development narrative of the ruling party. Second, the global women's movement, marked by the United Nations Decade for Women, brought international support which provided resources and affected the goals of the women's movement. Third, a commitment to addressing Belizean women's concerns such as family and health issues, rather than goals defined by the second-wave feminist movements from the developed world, was the driving ideology behind the movement. The eventual institutionalization of these goals into formal channels of the Belizean government stalled the movement's momentum in the 1990s, and the movement concluded with tangible gains to the women and communities of Belize, but without fundamentally transforming gender relations.

Background: Women and Belize's 20th Century Social Movements

Two important precursors to the Belizean women's movement were the Black Cross Nurses (BCN), a group of charitable, mainly Creole women founded in 1920, and women's involvement in the labor movement led by Antonio Soberanis and the Labor and Unemployed

Association (LUA). In both instances, women were involved in advocating for social change, however the BCN were a much more traditional, "respectable" group compared to the women protesting with LUA.

The Black Cross Nurses, founded in 1920, were a group of middle class,[1] predominantly Creole women, led by Vivian Seay, a former teacher. They focused primarily on documenting the conditions of people living in poverty in Belize Town, and on reducing the infant mortality rate. As Macpherson states, the BCN were "sympathetic to hardships caused by poverty but... never accepted it as an excuse for disrespect or disorder" (2007: 92). The BCN were useful to the British colonial state for two reasons: First, they helped to forge an "activist alliance between a reformist state and middle class" (Macpherson 2007: 72). Additionally, they furthered the existing social norms by "representing an extension of the traditional roles expected of women" (Shoman 2011: 139). Yet, while the BCN were by no means radical and often shamed and were condescending to working class women, they were important in beginning "the acceptance of women reformers as legitimate public actors" (Macpherson 2007: 72). Overall, despite their role in preserving the existing establishment by further cementing social norms and class relations, the BCN served as one of the first coordinated, female led, activism efforts and thus paved the way for the women's movement 40 years later.

Another important precursor to the women's movement is Antonio Soberanis' labor agitation with the Labor and Unemployed Association beginning in 1934 when the association was formed due to the extreme hardship caused by the Great Depression and a major hurricane. One of the most prominent protests led by the LUA was a strike of sawmill workers at the Belize

[1] The term "middle class" is used by Macpherson and Shoman to describe the women of the BCN, but this label warrants further explanation. These women generally did not need to sell their labor power, and if they did they served in higher-paying roles like nurses or teachers. The fact that they "promoted the male-headed nuclear family" further illustrates this fact (Macpherson 2007: 76). These characteristics describe very few Belizean women and are more representative of elite women, rather than the vaguely-defined "middle class."

Estate Company's sawmill where "crowds of men, women and children" besieged the facility, as the national newspaper The Clarion reported (Shoman 2011: 142). Though the core leader of this movement was a man, unlike the female-led BCN, working-class women, especially Creole and Garifuna women, made up at least half of the LUA's membership (Macpherson 2007). For Garifuna women in Stann Creek, farming and wage work in the citrus industry were common occupations, and they did not hesitate to submit complaints about working conditions or taxes directly to the governor (Macpherson 2007). Women in the LUA were not simply "members of a crowd"; rather, they were Soberanis' "chief collaborators" and some of the group's "sharpest thinkers and activists" (Macpherson 2007: 124, 120).

Assad Shoman highlights the ideological differences between the BCN and the LUA through their involvement in the lead-up to constitutional reforms in the 1930s, specifically in regards to women's right to vote. The proposed constitutional reforms provided women aged 30 and above who owned property the right to vote. On the one hand, the BCN advocated for equal voting rights with men; this would mean that propertied women aged 21 and over should have the right to vote. On the other hand, the women of the LUA Women's League took issue with the property requirements, arguing for the right of all working men and women to vote, regardless of property ownership. Ultimately, neither group was satisfied and the original proposed amendment was passed with the 30 year age minimum for women voters and high property requirements. Yet this division between elite women and working-class women is clearly illustrated by their different goals for suffrage rights. This split characterized most of women's activism up until the women's movement.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a radical social movement also arose from students returning from the U.S., Jamaica and other countries where they had become involved in Black

Power or anti-war activism, leading to the formation of two separate organizations, the United Black Association for Development (UBAD) and the People's Action Committee (PAC) (Shoman 2011). Though these organizations were important in crafting a radical liberal critique of Belize's two dominant parties as "representative of the same neocolonial system," they failed to involve women as major actors and supporters (Shoman 2011: 193). Particularly in UBAD, women tended to serve in more supportive and "traditional" positions. In fact, the gender policy of UBAD was "explicitly sexualized but also antifeminist," in that it promoted "black masculinity" and condemned the "womanish leaders of female dominated political parties" (a slight that is not only misogynistic but also homophobic, and likely directed at George Price) (Macpherson 2008: 244). Furthermore, another social movement that occurred around this time, the organization of sugar cane workers in northern Belize, was also primarily led by men (Shoman 2011). Thus, despite a history of women's activism prior to the period immediately before Belize's independence, women were not at the forefront of pre-independence activism.

Independence-Era Political Consciousness

The political atmosphere immediately before, during, and after Belize's independence played a role in shaping the trajectory of the women's movement. Through the aftermath of the Heads of Agreement, the development of the Belize Committee for Women and Development and the eventual election of the United Democratic Party (UDP) in 1984, the women's movement formed in part as a critique to the single-minded independence and national development narrative of the People's United Party (PUP).

The first major event that provides context for the roots of the women's movement is the aftermath of the signing of the Heads of Agreement on 11 March 1981. In the lead up to

independence, Belize faced the obstacle of Guatemala's claims to its territory (Shoman 2011). Guatemala sought to negotiate with the British so that Belize would only become independent if Guatemala was granted territory. The people and leadership of Belize, however, were vehemently against giving up any territory. From the late 1960s, negotiations were held between Britain, Belize, Guatemala, and the United States. Throughout these negotiations, George Price (of the PUP) served as the head of Belize's government.

In the midst of the negotiations, the 1979 election served as a referendum on the issue of independence. The PUP was fundamentally a nationalist party; national independence was their main agenda. By 1979, they had been in power for about 20 years. The United Democratic Party (UDP), which emerged out of the pro-colonial National Independence Party (NIP) in 1973, ran on the platform that it was "time for a change" in leadership and that independence should be delayed for at least ten years (Shoman 1987: 35). In 1979 the UDP expected to win the national election; the PUP ended up winning 13 of the 18 seats in the House of Representatives (Shoman and Wainwright, forthcoming).

The international negotiations continued until the Heads of Agreement were signed in March 1981. The non-binding agreement did not hand any of Belize's territory over to Guatemala, but it did contain a line allowing Guatemala the "use and enjoyment" of two cays in Belize (Shoman and Wainwright, forthcoming). Price had made it clear over the years of negotiations that he would not compromise with Belize's territory, and the Heads of Agreement were no exception. Yet, the UDP and other colonial forces expressed disapproval over the Heads and Belize's impending independence with several days of "strikes and violent demonstrations," including "the forcible closure of schools, offices and businesses" (Shoman 2011: 270). By April 2, the British government declared and enforced a state of emergency, and protests became

targets of police brutality. People were not allowed out in groups of more than three, and a curfew was enforced.

In my conversations with Ms. Ellis, she portrays this period of protest and turmoil as the period that sowed the seeds of the women's movement. Though the protests were essentially anti-independence, she instead emphasizes resistance against police brutality that the British inflicted during the state of emergency. Ms. Ellis describes this time as very exciting, because "young people and community leaders would just put up boxes at different corners of streets and begin to speak out on their observations for Belize's future" (Personal communication, 30 July 2020). She also depicts an inspiring scene of resistance under lockdown, saying, "you could hear Bob Marley music coming from houses all over the town, music that would speak about equal rights and justice" (Personal communication, 30 July 2020). Women's organizing played a role in these efforts, through meetings in personal homes or in churches under the cover of weddings or funerals. These covert meetings resulted in acts of civil disobedience, including the takeover of Belize's only radio station at the time and the blockage of the Swing Bridge, a major passageway in Belize City (Personal communication, 14 July 2020). Thus, Ms. Ellis provides a very different narrative of the Heads of Agreement Crisis and a stark contrast to depictions of the protests as violent, anti-independence, pro-colonial riots and another that portrays this as a period of civil disobedience and grassroots organizing. The missing piece to connect these two narratives may be found in the political context.

Despite the involvement of women's activists in the Heads of Agreement protests, I do not believe that women like Ms. Ellis were anti-independence. Rather, they were mainly dissatisfied with the leadership of the PUP.

As independence played out and the PUP remained in power, Cynthia Ellis and other women's activists were articulating their own critique of the process. Macpherson quotes Ms. Ellis' 1981 assertion that "the situation of women has often been submerged by the question of national liberation... and when considered at all, it has been seen as a secondary and insignificant problem" (Macpherson 2007: 242). This statement was part of the work of the Belize Committee for Women and Development (BCWAD), made up mainly of highly educated women like Ms. Ellis, who strived to keep the group neutral in regard to partisan politics "in order to work with, not under or inside, the state to combat women's cultural, economic, and political oppression" (Macpherson 2007: 242). In our discussions, Ms. Ellis describes the founding of BCWAD as a sign of the shift to "focusing on the concerns of women" in succession to the national development narrative (Personal communication, 20 August 2020). This growing awareness among women in Belize was likely influenced by the United Nations Decade for Women, which I will address later (McClaurin 1996). Macpherson highlights the importance of the group's publication Network in "insisting that improvements in women's lives should not await independence or general economic development" (Macpherson 2007: 245). Thus, the women's movement in Belize grew in part out of dissatisfaction with the agenda of the ruling party to focus solely on independence and national development, leaving the concerns of women to the side. Though the BCWAD aimed to remain nonpartisan, its members were clearly unhappy with the PUP leadership, and the women's movement would go on to thrive in the late 1980s under the leadership of UDP Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel. Indeed, Bette Lindo, who was married to UDP leader Dean Lindo, served as the first coordinator for BCWAD, and Cynthia Ellis would later run for mayor of Dangriga as the UDP candidate.

Influence from the United Nations Decade for Women

According to Ms. Ellis, another important factor that influenced the momentum and goals of the Belizean women's movement is the United Nations Decade for Women, which took place from 1975 to 1985. The Decade began out of the 1975 Year for Women with a conference in Mexico City "to remind the international community that discrimination against women continued to be a persistent problem in much of the world" (United Nations, n.d.). Historian Judith Zinsser holds a rosy view of this decade, characterizing it as "a series of events of revolutionary significance not only for women and the United Nations, but also for men and for history" (Zinsser 1990: 20). No longer were women the world's "invisible majority," because now they had a platform to share their concerns and bring feminist rhetoric to a global scale (Zinsser 1990). Kristen Ghodsee gives a more critical analysis of the decade in which she argues that it served as another stage for U.S.-U.S.S.R. opposition in the Cold War. She argues that the U.S. and allies sought to focus the conference on issues like "political rights and legal remedies for discrimination," while the U.S.S.R. held that "women's problems could never be disassociated from the political and economic realities in which they live" (Ghodsee 2009: 4).

Ghodsee's view of the Decade for Women as a stage for the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to struggle for influence in the landscape of the Cold War is also relevant in looking at the goals of the Belizean Women's Movement. My interviews with Ms. Ellis support Ghodsee's view of the ideological stakes of the Decade for Women. Ellis describes how at this time "it was a sin to even use the word communism" and many activists in Belize and other Central American and Caribbean countries were "perceived as so-called communists" for daring "to speak about the basic needs of people, food, water, land, healthcare, and so on" (Personal communication, 14 July 2020). Thus, social activists in Central America were viewed with suspicion because of

potential communist agendas. Later on, when women's organizing began to take off with help from funding agencies and resources from the United States, Canada and Europe, connections which were built during the Decade for Women, activists were criticized for bringing "alien" feminist ideas "that were not relevant to the bread and butter issues of developing countries" (Cynthia Ellis, personal communication, 24 August 2020). The civil war in Guatemala and the United States invasion of Grenada (where several social leaders from the Caribbean had worked with the New Jewel Movement government) also fueled hostility towards anything perceived as communism in Belize, further contributing to the women's movement's affiliation with the more pro-capitalist side of the U.N. (Cynthia Ellis, personal communication, 6 July 2020).

While I do not intend to argue that all women involved in the Belizean women's movement were actively aware of and influenced by the Decade for Women, the fact that Ms. Ellis was one of the leaders of the movement and she served as a representative to the United Nations and attended the 1985 Nairobi conference. Indeed, the moment which, in Ms. Ellis' view, marks the beginning of Belize's women's movement in earnest occurred on International Women's Day (March 8th) in 1983. Though the history of International Women's Day dates back longer, the United Nations officially recognized the day in 1975 at the start of the Decade, bringing increased visibility which led to celebrations of the day in numerous countries, including Belize. Indeed, Belize's 1983 International Women's Day event occurred because of urging and advice from the Women's Tribune Center, an NGO founded in 1976 in response to the Year for Women, with an office located directly across from the United Nations in New York (Cynthia Ellis, personal communication, 20 August 2020). Ms. Ellis looks back on the 1983 event fondly and with pride:

> It was a mobilization of people from all walks of life. We organized it right in front of the Supreme Court in Belize City; we blocked traffic. We had people from rural communities

> for the first time being celebrated and appreciated for the contribution that they made to the country. First time we had Maya women and men come in from the south. There were people from north, south, east and west presenting food that they had prepared, as well as their cultural songs and dances... I had [Radio Belize] do an open mic and invite women from all over the country to get up and pick up that mic and to speak about how they felt about their lives in Belize, and what were their dreams, and what were their ambitions. It was very powerful; we stopped traffic. (Personal communication, 20 August 2020).

Thus, Ms. Ellis' leadership in the women's movement was certainly tied to the goals and efforts of the United Nations Decade for Women, and although her leadership does not define the entirety of the movement it does play an important role. I hypothesize that this alliance between the Belizean women's movement and the United Nations' recognition of women stems from both the fact that increasing globalization meant that nation states alone could not address women's issues, or other social issues, in a satisfactory manner, as well as the funding and other forms of support from women's organizations in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe that stemmed from this focus on women.

On the first point, I would like to refer back to Fraser's argument, which states that one effect of globalization on women's movements is the shift in the relevance of the state-territorial principle of social responsibility. Recall that Fraser argues that the all-affected principle, where everyone affected by a particular social structure or institution has a right to justice, and the state-territorial principle, where individuals who are residents of a common nation state are entitled to the same justice, were more or less in alignment prior to increased globalization beginning in the 1970s (Fraser 2013). While Fraser acknowledges that this alignment was never fully realized because of colonialism and neocolonialism, as the world becomes more and more globalized these two principles move further out of alignment (Fraser 2013). Prior to Belize's independence, social welfare under the state-territoriality principle would have been the responsibility of the British. After independence; it would have been the responsibility of the

new Belizean state. However, the Belizean State was never the only actor affecting its residents' welfare. Through both pre-independence economic ties and post-independence Cold War ties, Belize was under the influence of a different imperial power, the United States. Thus, the social responsibility for Belizeans was not solely up to the state of Belize, because the United States and other countries (including Britain, despite the end of formal colonization) still maintained a degree of control over the rights and lives of Belizeans, so the women of Belize drew on these international connections in their struggle. Note that this was not the first time that the strategy of appealing to the international community was utilized in Belize. In the lead up to independence, George Price and other political leaders in the PUP successfully leveraged international support both within and outside the U.N. to pressure Britain to grant independence on terms that were favorable to Belize (Shoman and Wainwright, forthcoming). Thus, due to globalization and the demonstrated influence of international governance organizations, women in Belize were aware that the solutions to their problems would likely not be solved solely on the national level, so they turned to the United Nations for recognition and advocacy.

Another important motivation for Belizean feminists to connect their efforts to the U.N. Decade for Women is the availability of funding and other resources. As a result of the Decade for Women, the language of women in development began to emerge, along with new organizations to both give and receive funding towards improving the position of women in developing countries (McClaurin 1996). The Cold War struggle for influence also played a role here. While Ghodsee mentions the flow of "billions of dollars of foreign aid" from the West into Eastern Europe during and after the Decade for Women, this was also true in Central America and the Caribbean. Ms. Ellis credits the International Women's Tribune Center, affiliated with the United Nations and headquartered in New York, with helping women in Belize connect with

support, financial and otherwise, from the Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations (Personal communication, 30 July 2020). These U.S.-centered funding channels impacted the trajectory of the movement because they would tend to fund initiatives for women and development through projects that align with U.S. capitalist ideology.

Community-Led Goals

In addition to the more institutionalized affiliation with the U.N. Decade For Women, the goals of the Belizean women's movement remained driven by the needs of women living in urban and rural areas of Belize. Both Ms. Ellis' account of the time period and Irma McClaurin's 1996 ethnography *Women in Belize* emphasize the numerous women's organizations that sprung up during this time period in response to the local concerns of women in different communities.

The formation of the Belize Rural Women's Association (BRWA, evolved from the Belize Committee for Women and Development) in 1985, by which time the government was controlled by the UDP under Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel, marks a shift from the more politically-motivated organizing during the Heads of Agreement crisis and the following political discourse surrounding women's issues in the context of independence. In Ms. Ellis' account of the time period, she returns to the act of going out into Belize's communities with Regina Martinez, another Garifuna leader and co-founder of the BRWA, and listening to the concerns of women there. Rather than the "alien" feminist ideas that critics of the women's movement lambasted, the BRWA focused on the "bread and butter" issues that many saw as more applicable to the developing world, including family issues like health and economic wellness. As Satya Gabriel argues, "BRWA does not promote an ideology of 'liberating' women from men, but of 'mutual liberation' of men and women from the consequences, material and non-material, of

colonial oppression, racism, and exploitation" (Gabriel 1990). Indeed, while Ms. Ellis was educated abroad in women's studies, her counterpart in the BRWA, Regina Martinez, was a mother of 14 living in rural Belize who was in touch with rural women's concerns. Ms. Ellis explains her initial connection with Martinez as an enlightening one:

> Regina Martinez would always approach me and ask me, "so what is the relevance of what you are doing for rural communities, for women who are struggling, making provisions for food, for their families, for their health and wellness?" It was a new experience for me... That was how the journey began through her, to address the issues of rural families, rural women. (Personal communication, 20 August 2020).

This interaction is what sparked the planning of the 1983 International Women's Day celebration. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, organizations like the BRWA made up the bulk of women's activism. Ellis and Martinez, among others, spent time in Belize's rural communities and came up with various programs to address the issues brought up by women: often concerns having to do with food, clothing, shelter, and community and family wellness. These projects ranged from connecting women with resources to form a cooperative, as in the case of the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative, or in smaller projects like obtaining a truck that farmers could use to transport their produce to a market (Cynthia Ellis, personal communication, 22 August 2020).

Irma McClaurin also discusses the rise of women's organizations across Belize during this period, specifically in response to concerns in their local communities. McClaurin finds that "women were more likely to organize around issues that were specific to their community or that affected their social roles as wives and mothers and might also help them in the activities they performed in the domestic sphere" (1996, 166). Though this contrasts with the explicitly feminist ideology of women's movements in the developed world, McClaurin cites Brenner and Laslett (1991) to argue that "any collective action in which women as activists and leaders define foals

and construct strategies, not only self-consciously feminist organizing" is political in nature (313).

Decline of the Women's Movement

At the same time that these grassroots organization efforts were occurring, services for women and families became institutionalized through formal governmental departments, like the Women and Family Support Department in the Ministry of Human Development. As Ms. Ellis recounted to me, a discrepancy evolved "between the women's movement organizing and institutionalized services for women through the women's department" (Personal communication, 20 August 2020). Furthermore, the 1989 election brought a shift in power from the UDP, which many leaders of the women's movement had ties to, to the PUP, which likely further hastened the decline of the momentum of women's organizing. Unfortunately, the incorporation of women's issues into an official government department stalled the spark of the movement. The government itself was unable or unwilling to deliver the benefits of post-independence economic growth to the people, including the women and communities that the BRWA worked with (Shoman 2011).

While women's concerns were incorporated into the state but simultaneously left unaddressed, we also see evidence of the NGO-ification of women's organizing that Nancy Fraser writes about in the structure of the Belizean women's movement. Recall Fraser's argument that in instances where NGOs arose to tackle social issues where states failed to deliver, the ultimate effect was to depoliticize and deradicalize grassroots movements and to "skew the agendas of local groups in directions favored by First-World funders" (Fraser 2013: 300). This phenomenon likely played a role in Belize, especially given the movement's

connections to the U.N. Decade for Women and other affiliated U.S.-based organizations. Thus, the momentum of the movement stalled, leaving a tangible legacy of the organizations and standard of living improvements facilitated by the BRWA, but without substantially transforming gender relations in Belize.

IV. Museum Creation at the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative

My second case study focuses on the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative, a group of Garifuna women in Hopkins Village, Belize, that resulted in part from the women's organizing that occurred through Ms. Ellis' work with the Belize Rural Women's Association. The Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative has built on their status as rural Garifuna women to create a legacy as part of the Belizean women's movement and an important site for Garifuna cultural heritage today. Specifically, I follow their efforts to create a Garifuna cultural heritage museum, which requires the women to negotiate both international and local networks of funding and support while also striving to maintain their own vision for the content and outcomes of the museum. The process of imagining and creating the museum raises contentious issues of cultural politics. Here, I focus on three: first, the politics of migration and tourism; second, the transnational character of Garifuna activism; and third, the access to and ownership of Garifuna ancestral lands.

Background and Historical Context

Before becoming a Cooperative, Sandy Beach began as a group of women making fruit preserves and macramé in 1980. Later, they began making tamales and panades as they continued to grow. In 1985, the women decided they wanted to go into tourism and they began the process of registering as a cooperative which was completed on May 12, 1986, during the peak of the women's movement in Belize.

Earlier, I established that the women's movement in Belize arose in part from the United Nations Decade for Women and from Belize's independence from Britain in 1981. Through the convergence of these two events, the women of Belize began to realize that women's issues

should no longer be submerged by the question of national liberation. The women's movement in Belize began in earnest following the 1983 International Women's Day celebration, where people from all walks of life organized in Belize City to draw attention to the difficulties they faced, their dreams, and their ambitions as women in Belize (Cynthia Ellis, personal communication, 20 August 2020). In this context, the women of the SBWC became determined to generate their own source of income as an equivalent to the farming and fishing cooperatives available to the Garifuna men of Hopkins (Merlene Castillo, personal communication, 17 July 2019). Mark Moberg expands on the income sources of men and women in Hopkins, arguing that men tended to satisfy "the bulk of the household's income requirements with fishing and migratory wage labor and women procuring domestic staples" (Moberg 1992: 68). There was little opportunity for Garifuna women in Hopkins to generate their own income, though some were involved in citrus farming, and in 1992 Moberg feared that because of men's involvement in commercial agriculture would lead to the marginalization of women in the community (Moberg 1992, Bliss 1992). Thus, Sandy Beach is an important site in the history of Belize, as one of the remaining tangible outcomes of the women's movement and a group that allowed women in Hopkins to develop their own source of income. In building a museum, they are not just contributing to the memory of the Garifuna people, but also to the recognition of the important role that women have played in the history of Belize.

When the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative was founded, it was the home of the first hotel and first restaurant in Hopkins Village. It was also the first cooperative in Belize created solely by women. Sandy Beach has hosted over a thousand visitors and introduced many to Garifuna food, drumming, dance and language. The cooperative has an outstanding record of supporting community fund-raisers and initiatives. These are some reasons why Andy Palacio,

Ivan Duran, and the Garifuna Collective elected to make Sandy Beach their home during the recording of the famous album "Wátina" (2007). The association with this album is part of what makes Sandy Beach a unique site for a museum dedicated to Garifuna culture and heritage, as music plays an important role in Garifuna cultural preservation and revitalization (Gallagher 2013, Ramsdell 2020).

Both Hopkins and the cooperative itself have changed significantly since 1980. As Mark Moberg put it in 1992, "the placid appearance that Hopkins presents to outsiders affords little evidence of the economic changes taking place among its residents" (Moberg 1992: 38). This is even more true today. Hopkins is now home to many hotels and restaurants, including a number that were built with foreign capital and/or by foreigners who have become residents of the village. Additionally, a large luxury resort complex has been built just to the south of the village. All these have brought more tourists as well as intense competition for tourist dollars. Since losing their monopoly on service provision, Sandy Beach has seen their market share dwindle. In the two years prior to COVID-19, they had very little tourist income. Since the pandemic, tourism has collapsed; the cooperative presently has seen essentially no business.

Cultural Heritage at Sandy Beach

When UNESCO designated Garifuna language, dance and music as intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2001, it formally recognized what people already knew: that the culture and history of the Garifuna are unique, important, and worthy of recognition and preservation efforts. Yet the preservation of cultural heritage raises complex social and political questions. What forms of cultural heritage should receive emphasis for preservation? Who has the authority to shape or define the narratives of heritage projects? Who should benefit from specific cultural

heritage initiatives, and how can we act to ensure that they receive those benefits? For the Garifuna community in Belize, these questions involve those living in Belize's Garifuna communities as well as Garifuna people living in Belize City or abroad, the role of the government, the role of gender and age, the tangible and intangible aspects of Garifuna culture and more. To begin exploring these questions, I use the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative in Hopkins Village, Belize, as a case study.

The National Institute of Culture and History defines itself as "Belize's premiere cultural institution dedicated to the safeguarding, promotion, expression, conservation and sustainable development of culture in all its diversity in collaboration with the people of Belize" (National Institute of Culture and History, n.d.). One relevant department within NICH is the Houses of Culture Department, which runs both Museum of Belize and oversees the administration of seven different Houses of Culture across the country. The Houses of Culture are broadly defined as "dynamic, creative community centres where neighbours, residents and students can come together to learn, teach, and pursue their favourite cultural activity," especially in areas like "music, literature, dance, drama and the plastic arts" (National Institute of Culture and History, n.d.). One such House of Culture is the Gulisi Museum, a Garifuna culture and history museum in Dangriga, the nearest city to Hopkins, where there is a large Garifuna population. These Houses of Culture demonstrate that the Government of Belize does not view cultural heritage in the strictly tangible sense. Instead, culture is a lived activity that is inherited through continued practice, and the Houses of Culture serve as spaces to facilitate this practice.

The museum at Sandy Beach works with the NICH model, as it aims to preserve and embody important practices in Garifuna culture, but it also goes further, connecting to Laurajane Smith's conception of cultural heritage. First, as Smith argues, "material remnants are not

themselves ‘heritage’, but rather theatres or sites of memory... at which individuals, policymakers, bodies of expertise and so forth, engage in performances that construct and negotiate cultural and social identities and the various values that buttress these identities” (Smith 2010: 63). In my work with Sandy Beach, much attention has been given to the physical site. Following an unfortunate fire at the cooperative in the early 2000s, only one building remains that was used by musician Andy Palacio and the Garifuna Collective during the recording of their Wátina album. Emphasis has been placed on this particular building, intended to serve as the site of the museum. However, despite this emphasis on the physical space, as well as on other physical aspects like artifacts from Andy Palacio’s life and Garifuna culture and the museum itself as a material space, I argue that in accordance with Smith’s analysis, the cultural heritage embodied by this site extends beyond the physical buildings and artifacts; Sandy Beach is a physical articulation of the vast intangible cultural heritage of the music of Andy Palacio, the history of the Belizean women’s movement, the challenges of the tourism economy, the transnational Garifuna nation, and the ancestral land rights of the Garifuna people.

Labor Outcomes of Tourism and Migration

Among the various social factors at play in Sandy Beach’s museum project, one that stands out is generational. The Garifuna women who started Sandy Beach are, today, in their 60s and 70s. Young Garifuna women generally have a different status and opportunity structure than the previous generation; They have more formal education and (prior to COVID) greater access to jobs domestically in the tourism industry as well as opportunities to pursue higher education or other economic initiatives abroad.

Though Sandy Beach was the first tourism-related business in Hopkins, competition has multiplied since their beginning in the 1980s. When the cooperative was founded, it was one of the only ways for Garifuna women in the area to generate their own income, but by the 2010s, multiple resorts, restaurants, hostels, and other tourism businesses offered employment to Garifuna women from Hopkins. Most of these alternatives promised higher, or more regular, pay than Sandy Beach can currently provide. The dominance of resorts and hotels in the labor market is not unique to Hopkins. Mark Anderson highlights a similar situation at a resort located just outside a Garifuna community in Sambo Creek, Honduras, where the only interaction between the community and the resort guests is through Garifuna community members working as bartenders, waiters, room cleaners, et cetera. At the same time, images of Garifuna culture are used to attract tourists without fair compensation to Garifuna communities (Anderson 2009). Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2004) also highlight the dissatisfaction of the Garifuna community at Roatan in Honduras with the commodification of their culture for tourism, specifically because the commodification was out of their control and they were not able to receive the economic benefits. Sandy Beach is a case where the Garifuna community, rather than resort owners, stands to benefit from the economic potential of their culture; even so, they struggle to compete for labor and guests with larger resorts.

Competition for labor in the tourism industry is not the only factor contributing to the difficulty that Sandy Beach, and a wider Garifuna activism movement, faces in recruiting young members. Many young Belizeans, and especially young Garifuna people, leave the country to attend university abroad or to seek out other economic opportunities. As Sarah England writes, migration "has increased to the point that it has become an integral part of Garifuna society" (2006: 2). This has left Garifuna villages in southern Belize with inhabitants who are primarily

over the age of fifty or under the age of fourteen, with very few people of working age (Palacio 2019). While some return after receiving their education, many will instead send remittances to family members or maintain property locally so that they can come back and visit. This is the case in Hopkins, "a place that young people leave and older people return to," where "foreign-bound migrants state their intention to reside only temporarily in the United States" but few return to live permanently in the village (Moberg 1992: 41). Despite this, the ties that former residents maintain to the village are strong, as those born in the village "will forever 'belong' to it, even if they spend the bulk of their lives elsewhere" (Moberg 1992: 39).

Sandy Beach's members believe the museum could help the cooperative attract new members. A successful museum could generate tourist traffic to help Sandy Beach pay more competitive wages, allowing the coop to hire young women looking for employment related to Garifuna heritage. Additionally, it will allow Garifuna people in the community to benefit from the economic value of Garifuna culture, rather than resort owners. At the same time, the museum cannot solve all the systematic challenges that Sandy Beach faces as a small business in the context of the globalized, resort-centered tourism economy.

Local and Transnational Actors

While many members of the Garifuna Diaspora feel strongly about maintaining what Joseph Palacio (2005) calls the "nation across borders" by remaining connected to Garifuna culture and ancestral lands in Central America and the Caribbean. This desire is what links "cities such as New York and Los Angeles with villages in Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala through kinship ties, economic transactions, and community organizations" (England 2006: 2). This connection is facilitated by improvements in travel and telecommunications technology,

particularly in the context of virtual communication in the COVID-19 pandemic, and can manifest itself in membership in transnational Garifuna activist networks, as well as participation in online platforms like the Garinet website to remain up to date on Garifuna news and culture (Matthei and Smith 2008). Meanwhile, Garifuna people residing locally in Central America also have immediate concerns about land access, living conditions and local politics. This increases the difference in priorities between those Garifuna who are situated in Central America on traditional Garifuna territory, like Sandy Beach, and those who no longer reside in the area, though they may still have local family members or property. Sandy Beach's museum-creation project has generated support from both international and local actors, including both Garifuna and non-Garifuna people. Specifically, I address the benefits and obstacles of Sandy Beach's relationship with the transnational Garifuna network, the reliance on logistical support from representatives in the Cooperatives Department of the Government of Belize, and my own role as a student and researcher in helping Sandy Beach to obtain grants and communicate with activists, government officials and funders.

The international Garifuna community undoubtedly bears a role in the sustenance of Garifuna cultural heritage at home through their financial resources and organizing capacity. Through the organizing efforts of the international Garifuna community, Sandy Beach has gained a platform for recognition of their work. This international network has expressed support for the museum project, as it serves their larger goal of increased recognition of Garifuna cultural heritage within Belize. Additionally, Sandy Beach's location on ancestral Garifuna lands and their recent move to purchase the land their site occupies is a small step towards securing ancestral lands to the Garifuna people, another goal of the international Garifuna community. The organizing capacity and the financial resources of this international network are potentially

useful to Sandy Beach's museum project, as well as other local efforts at preserving Garifuna history. To date, the $24,000 secured for the project has come from U.S.-based organization Self Development of the People, acquired with assistance from the international Garifuna network as well as myself, Ms. Cynthia Ellis, my advisor Dr. Wainwright, and representatives from the Belizean government. While these international connections undoubtedly provide benefits to Sandy Beach, there is also reason for the women to remain cautious in order to ensure that their goals for themselves and the future of the cooperative remain the priority, rather than broader goals of cultural recognition and land sovereignty.

The role that the women of Sandy Beach play for the transnational Garifuna community is less tangible. Connections to local organizations like Sandy Beach are necessary to ground international appeals to Garifuna activism around land rights and cultural recognition. Sandy Beach provides a focal point for Garifuna activism: their museum contributes to the goal of building a transnational movement of Garifuna people. However, for this relationship to succeed, the international Garifuna network will need to devote time and effort to strengthening their connections with local actors. The COVID-19 pandemic further complicates the situation as international and local travel have been severely reduced. There are numerous Garifuna groups that claim to represent the Garifuna nationally and internationally, yet in places like Hopkins the rootedness of these organizations in the community is shallow. The challenge in attempting to build a Garifuna movement without the mutual commitment of both local and international actors is that increased recognition and other achievements of the international community will not translate into material benefits for Garifuna people living in Belize.

Next, I look at the role of officials from the Government of Belize in the Cooperatives Department in Sandy Beach's success over time and in their museum creation project. When I

began working with Ms. Merlene and the women of Sandy Beach in 2019, I was quickly introduced to an official from the government with whom the group has a close relationship. The cooperative has built a relationship of trust with members of the Cooperatives Department because of their assistance with administering grants in the past and in securing logistical support for their work. Though the Cooperatives Department has provided important support to Sandy Beach in the past, in recent years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sandy Beach has relied heavily on government officials for all virtual communication. In fact, Sandy Beach's official email account is not administered by any of the members, and the only person who has access is a member of the government. For most of Sandy Beach's history, the women have not had, nor needed, internet access, email accounts, or other forms of online communication that are in many ways essential today. This explains why Sandy Beach's official email is not monitored by the women themselves, but by one of their (male) allies in the Cooperatives Department. Though the work of these government representatives has been helpful to Sandy Beach, this relationship poses a problem. Individual officials can switch offices or be removed altogether following an election and typically have other agendas or duties to complete that prevent them from being fully committed to supporting the work of a small group like Sandy Beach. The women will need to develop their own capacity in regard to virtual communication, especially in the context of the pandemic now that email, Facebook, Skype, and Zoom are the dominant forms of communication. In recent years, Ms. Merlene has set up WiFi in her own house and on the Sandy Beach property, and she has attended Zoom calls with activists from the Garifuna community to speak on the work Sandy Beach is doing. This is a positive step towards increasing the management capacity of the cooperative at a time when many people are quickly learning to use technology that was once foreign to them. In the future, similar steps towards

increased capacity and autonomy, particularly in the case of land ownership and management, which I discuss below, are needed.

It is also important to note that I, as the researcher, am not a neutral actor: I hope to see Sandy Beach's museum succeed. After spending two weeks in Hopkins with Ms. Merlene in 2019 to learn about the cooperative's history and goals, I began working with the group to craft grant proposals and communicate with funding agencies and other parties interested in supporting Sandy Beach. Thus, as with the international Garifuna network, I am able to bring value to Sandy Beach through my knowledge as a student from the U.S., and I also gain from the opportunity to learn about the women and the history of Sandy Beach in pursuit of my thesis. I am well-equipped to assist with writing and submitting grant proposals, as I have written proposals to fund my own research and I am comfortable with the style of writing and I am familiar with what information should be included in a proposal. However, since Sandy Beach does not control their own email, if I submit a grant proposal on their behalf, then all communications from the funding agency will come to me, putting me in a position as the intermediary between the funding agency and the cooperative. In general, I am comfortable acting as an intermediary, by sending emails to the funding agency and calling Ms. Merlene to relay information to her. However, when thousands of dollars of grant money are at stake, it is problematic for the communication between Sandy Beach and the funding agency to hinge on whether I, as a student, have the availability to call Ms. Merlene multiple times in a week.

Right to Garifuna Ancestral Lands

The issue of land rights and land ownership is both a motivator and an obstacle in the process of creating the museum and ensuring SBWC's long-term success. Though SBWC has

existed on the same land since 1986, as of January 2021 they do not hold official ownership, but rather a lease on the land. The same forces working against Sandy Beach's land ownership, specifically the high value of the land resulting from the growth of the tourism industry, also work against the recognition of Garifuna ancestral lands across the eastern coast of Central America. Thus, Sandy Beach's efforts to maintain control over their land in relation to the larger tourism economy and other factors also provide important context for the Garifuna land rights and sovereignty on a larger scale, and can be used as a case study in future Garifuna land reclamation efforts.

Sandy Beach is far from the only place where Garifuna land reclamation efforts are taking place. Many case studies in Garifuna land rights originate in Honduras, where state efforts to modernize and develop the tourism economy have led to the forcible displacement of Garifuna people from ancestral lands (Mollett 2014). Keri Vacanti Brondo (2007) looks at the targeting of Garifuna women who were involved in a push for the reclamation of Garifuna ancestral lands following the privatization and subsequent tourism development of Honduras' coast in the 1990s and 2000s. Some of these women were killed, searched, or pushed out of their own homes (Brondo 2007). Kimberly Palmer also looks at the case of Garifuna lands in Honduras, highlighting "stay on the land" movements to "perform land-use in accordance with dominant norms" in order to prevent Garifuna lands from being taken over (2019: 13). Unlike the communities that Brondo and Palmer work with, Sandy Beach does not face the threat of their land violently being taken away. Rather, they face economic challenges that threaten to dispossess the cooperative, and other Garifuna communities, of their land in more subtle ways.

The value of the land where Sandy Beach is situated has rocketed over the past 35 years as more resorts, hostels and restaurants have moved in to meet the demands of increased tourism.

This presents a few problems for Sandy Beach: first, the high land value means that it is simply more expensive to purchase. Second, there is a high opportunity cost, as the women have the ability to make a lot more money by selling their land than by working hard to purchase it. These economic obstacles are connected to the difficulty that Sandy Beach faces in gaining new members in competition with better paying jobs in other tourism businesses. A successful museum, with support from the Garifuna diaspora, may help.

Another factor that plays an important role in Sandy Beach's difficulty to obtain land ownership is gender. In my work with Ms. Ellis and the SBWC, the discussion of both obtaining land rights and building the capacity of the women in the cooperative to obtain the land rights for themselves has been a recurring theme. We also examined this issue in the context of the greater movement among Garifuna people in Belize towards land reclamation. According to former Minister of Lands Dr. Carla Barnett (2021), in Belize it is the case that more often than not men, rather than women, are the main actors in seeking land ownership and autonomy. This has often been the case with Sandy Beach, where two male members of the Cooperatives Department assist them regularly in issues like land management and other matters that require interaction between the Cooperative and the government. In purchasing the title for their land, Sandy Beach is taking a tangible step towards building their autonomy and independence as a cooperative.

V. Conclusion

This project has explored themes of cultural heritage and preservation, women's activism, and indigenous rights to land and recognition. In my first subproject with Ms. Cynthia Ellis, I created a narrative documenting some of the women's organizing efforts during Belize's women's movement in the 1980s and 1990s. While this narrative does not provide a complete picture of the women's movement, it is one of the only written accounts of the accomplishments of the women of Belize in that time period. I also propose factors that contributed to both the growth and the deceleration of women's organizing in Belize. The beginning of the women's movement was fueled in part by the global momentum of the United Nations Decade for Women, as well as the national social consciousness surrounding Belize's independence. The eventual loss of this momentum in the 1990s occurred when both the Decade for Women and the post-independence political turmoil had subsided, and the concerns of the women of Belize were de-radicalized and incorporated into governmental departments and NGOs which were not, and still are not, well-equipped or well-motivated to provide substantial, transformative change for the situation of women in Belize.

While the organizing efforts of women in Belize faded in the 1990s, we can still see the outcomes of the movement today through groups like the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative, the subject of my second subproject. The women of SBWC began their cooperative in the 1980s, with help from Ms. Ellis and other organizers from the women's movement. Today, their cooperative remains on the same site, where they face new problems that have arisen over the past couple decades, in regard to the growing tourism economy of Hopkins and the transnational character of Garifuna activism and migration. The dedication to founding a Garifuna cultural heritage museum in response to some of these new problems is illustrative of the same

dedication that has kept the cooperative alive for over 40 years. In addition to these newer difficulties, SBWC is also situated among the same adversities that the Garifuna people have always faced: particularly, a lack of cultural recognition and threats to their autonomy over Garifuna ancestral lands. The work of both the SBWC and Cynthia Ellis represent the determination of Garifuna women in carving out their own space, no matter what obstacles, new or old, seek to restrain them.

Over the course of this project, the topic and the people involved have pivoted numerous times to adapt to changing circumstances. When I began working with the SBWC in 2019, I could not have foreseen that a global pandemic would render my plan to spend the summer of 2020 completing fieldwork in Belize impossible. Though I have not yet been able to return to Belize, the COVID-19 pandemic only increased the urgency of this project by completely eliminating the tourist traffic to Sandy Beach. Despite the difficulties of remaining connected virtually, I was able to work with Sandy Beach to apply for a grant for the museum project. As I am making the final edits to my thesis, Sandy Beach is receiving the payment of a substantial grant which will aid in the future development of the museum. I am also in the process of applying for a grant for myself to fund a future trip to Belize so that I can remain involved in the project and continue to provide assistance as the women of Sandy Beach see fit.

Similarly, when COVID-19 caused me to cancel my trip, I did not expect that a connection with Cynthia Ellis would turn into a project that would make up a major part of my thesis and one that will continue after it is completed. Though we have yet to meet face to face, I have spent countless hours meeting with Cynthia via Zoom and WhatsApp as I interviewed her on her life's work, both to help inform my thesis and to assist her in the future publication of a memoir. I also have been involved in her work with Garifuna Nation, a transnational Garifuna

activist organization, where I have had the chance to participate in multiple conferences on Garifuna cultural recognition and land rights and watch the development of the movement firsthand. As with Sandy Beach, this work with Cynthia and with Garifuna Nation is far from over; over the past week, Garifuna Nation has taken steps to formalize their goals by holding a press conference and distributing a press release to communicate their stance on the urgency of the Garifuna land rights issue. Looking back, it is amazing to see how all the moving parts of these projects have begun to fall into place. I look forward to remaining involved in the future.

The stories of both Cynthia Ellis and the SBWC intersect on the greater theme of a history of Garifuna women's activism in Belize. Through these two examples, we see a small picture of the impact of Garifuna women in the development of Belize as a nation, and in the development of the Garifuna people as a nation. One area for future research is to broaden this picture further, with studies on the Belizean women's movement, Garifuna cultural heritage, or both. Topics on the Belizean women's movement could include the documentation of perspectives of other leaders in the women's movement, archival research on the other groups and initiatives founded by women during the movement, and case studies with other groups like Sandy Beach, who were founded in the women's movement and remain standing today. Future research on Garifuna cultural heritage could come in the form of investigations about local Garifuna groups or about the transnational Garifuna activism movement, as well as documenting the history of the Garifuna, with particular attention to Garifuna ancestral lands in Belize and other countries.

Future research on these topics have great potential for social impact. As I have mentioned, there is currently very little research and documentation about the accomplishments of women during Belize's women's movement. Further research in this area would help provide

recognition for these women, most of whom are still alive today. Additionally, research on topics of Garifuna cultural heritage, including land rights and recognition, could have tangible implications in the ongoing struggle for the Garifuna people of Central America to receive rights and/or reparations for their ancestral lands, as well as increased recognition in a way that brings respect and autonomy to the Garifuna people, rather than simply commodifying and profiting from recognizable attributes of Garifuna culture.

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